

Message Text

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PAGE 01 COLOMB 00099 101221Z

ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-07 INR-07 LAB-04
NSAE-00 SIL-01 TRSE-00 OMB-01 NEAE-00 DODE-00 NSCE-00
SSO-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 PM-04 H-01 L-03 NSC-05 PA-01
PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 MCT-01 /064 W
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O R 101117Z JAN 77

FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6501

INFO AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

AMCONSUL BOMBAY

AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

AMCONSUL MADRAS

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E.O. 11652:N/A

TAGS: PINT, ELAB, CE

SUBJECT: STRIKE IN SRI LANKA: DAILY WRAPUP

REF: COLOMBO 71

1. SUMMARY. FOUR BUS WORKERS UNIONS HAVE JOINED THE ONGOING STRIKE BUT LIMITED BUS SERVICE CONTINUES. DOCTORS HAVE ENDED THEIR GO-SLOW CAMPAIGN. ADAMANT RAILWORKERS REMAIN OUT ALTHOUGH A FEW TRAINS ARE BEING RUN. MEETINGS HAVE BEEN BANNED IN COLOMBO AND THERE ARE RUMORS THAT PRESS CENSORSHIP WILL BE IMPOSED. END SUMMARY.

2. FOUR UNIONS OF THE CEYLON TRANSPORT BOARD--THE NATIONALIZED BUS SYSTEM--HAVE GONE ON STRIKE FROM JANUARY 10, BUT WITH THE STRONG SRI LANKA FREEDOM PARTY (SLFP) UNION STILL ON THE JOB, BUS SERVICE IN COLOMBO SO FAR REMAINS GENERALLY ADEQUATE, WITH SOME REDUCTION IN SERVICE. THE UNIONS ON STRIKE ARE AFFILIATED TO THE OPPOSITION UNITED NATIONAL PARTY, THE OPPOSITION LANKA SAMA SAMAJA PARTY, THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 02 COLOMB 00099 101221Z

SLFP'S COALITION PARTNER THE COMMUNIST PARTY, AND ONE WING OF THE SLFP ITSELF (HEADED BY NANDA ELLAWALA, MP FROM RATNAPURA). IT IS RUMORED THAT MORE WORKERS MAY JOIN THE STRIKE BY JANUARY 11 AS AGITATION BY THE FOUR UNIONS CONTINUES. THIRTY-SOME LABOR ORGANIZERS ARE REPORTED TO HAVE BEEN ARRESTED , MANY FOR INCITING BUS EMPLOYEES TO GO ON STRIKE.

3. GOVERNMENT DOCTORS VOTED JANUARY 9 TO RETURN TO NORMAL WORK, BY GIVING UP THEIR GO-SLOW CAMPAIGN, AFTER A CARROT-AND-STICK OPERATION BY THE GOVERNMENT, WHICH HAD THREATENED CONFISCATION OF PROPERTY UNDER THE ESSENTIAL SERVICES ORDER AND HAD MET SOME OF THE DOCTORS' DEMANDS CONCERNING RESIGNATION FROM GOVERNMENT SERVICE AND GRANTING OF LEAVE. THE DOCTORS' WORK-TO-RULE CAMPAIGN, ELEVEN WEEKS OLD, PREDATES THE CURRENT LABOR UNREST AND WAS NEVER REALLY CONNECTED. NEVERTHELESS THE GOVERNMENT IS NO DOUBT GLAD TO HAVE AT LEAST ONE SEGMENT OF THE LABOR FORCE BACK ON THE JOB. THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH HAD BEEN NEGOTIATING WITH THE DOCTORS, IN CONTRAST WITH THE INTRANSIGENT ATTITUDE OF THE MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT, WHICH PROMISES TO TALK WITH WITH THE RAIL WORKERS ONLY AFTER THEY RETURN TO THE JOB.

4. THE RAIL STRIKE, WHICH HAS BECOME THE REASON GIVEN BY OTHER UNIONS TO COME OUT, CONTINUES REASONABLY SOLID, ALTHOUGH THE PRESS HAS TRUMPETED THE RUNNING OF A FEW TRAINS, ALL HEAVILY GUARDED BY THE ARMY AND POLICE. THOSE FEW TRAINS HAVE BEEN RUN MOSTLY IN THE NORTHERN AND NORTH CENTRAL PROVINCES ONLY TWO FREIGHT TRAINS LEFT JAN. 8 FROM COLOMBO FOR KANDY WITH ARMY AND HELICOPTER ESCORT, TAKING EIGHT HOURS FOR THE 70-ODD MILES.

THE PROCESS WAS NOT REPEATED THE FOLLOWING DAY.

5. THE GOVERNMENT HAS BANNED THE HOLDING OF PUBLIC MEETINGS IN THE COLOMBO DISTRICT. THE RADIO CONTINUES TO WARN STRIKING GOVERNMENT SERVANTS THAT ALL LEAVE HAS BEEN CANCELLED AND THAT ANYONE WHO DOES NOT SHOW UP FOR WORK WILL BE DEEMED TO HAVE GIVEN UP HIS JOB. NEVERTHELESS MANY GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS ARE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 COLOMB 00099 101221Z

WORKING WITH ONLY A SKELETON CLERICAL STAFF.

6. WE HAVE HEARD A REPORT THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAS DECIDED TO IMPOSE PRESS CENSORSHIP AS IT DID DURING THE 1971 INSURGENCY. SUPPOSEDLY THE ORDER IS TO BE PUBLISHED IN THE GAZETTE JANUARY 10 OR 11 AND IMPLEMENTED IMMEDIATELY. THIS WAS SAID TO HAVE BEEN ANNOUNCED BY GOVERNMENT SPOKESMAN RIDGEWAY TILLEKERATNE (SECRETARY, MINISTRY OF INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING) AT A FRIDAY PRESS CONFERENCE BUT OUR REPORT IS STILL UNCONFIRMED. (SEE SEPARATE USINFO TELEGRAM). IN ANY EVENT THE GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED LAKE HOUSE PRESS GROUP IS ALREADY DOING A GOOD JOB OF SELF-CENSORSHIP, AND ONLY THE TIMES GROUP AMONG THE ENGLISH PRESS HAS BEEN REPORTING REASONABLY ACCURATE DETAILS OF VARIOUS WORK STOPPAGES. ANY CENSORSHIP WOULD HIT HARDEST AT THE LSSP AND CP-CONTROLLED SINHALA-LANGUAGE PRESS.

7. THE ONLY ADDITIONAL UNION WE KNOW OF WITH DEFINITE PLANS TO COME OUT IN THE NEXT FEW DAYS IS THE LSSP -CONTROLLED CEYLON FEDERATION OF LABOR, IN A STRIKE WHICH SHOULD AFFECT MOSTLY

PRIVATE-SECTOR FIRMS AND SOME GOVERNMENT CORPORATIONS. OTHER GOVERNMENT BODIES WHICH MIGHT BE AFFECTED IN THE NEXT FEW DAYS ARE THE CEYLON ELECTRICITY BOARD, AND THE CEYLON PETROLEUM CORPORATION (ONLY ONE OF WHOSE THREE MAIN UNIONS IS LSSP-ORIENTED). THESE REPORTS ARE UNSUBSTANTIATED BUT ANY WORK STOPPAGE IN THOSE ORGANIZATIONS COULD FURTHER CONTRIBUTE TO CURRENT DISORDER.

8. THE EMBASSY HAS ONE REPORT THAT THE GOVERNMENT IS CONSIDERING IMPOSING A CURFEW FROM JANUARY 11.
REED

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